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Those people who are dealing directly with the food problem are not the only ones who should study it and observe the principles involved in it. Every man, woman and child should enter into the war to the extent of realizing each his own personal, individual responsibility and should play his part if our country hopes to win the war for democracy. It will take every bit that everybody has, with perfect team play, to win the battle. God grant that we may win it soon.

THE HOUSEKEEPER AND THE FOOD PROBLEM

BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN,

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The food problem is:

A. How to produce the most food with the least cost in time, labor and money;

B. How to distribute it to the consumer most swiftly, efficiently and economically;

C. How to prepare and serve it, with the least cost in time, labor and money, and with the best effect on our health and happiness.

The housekeeper is the person who stands before the third clause in the problem; who is immediately responsible for those last elements of cost and of human well-being. She is not ultimately responsible, as she acts under direction. The income of the head of the family limits the style in which they live, and his tastes count strongly in the manner of food served. But as he deposes this work to the housekeeper and abides by the result, she becomes the direct agent in the choice and treatment of the world's food.

Food is produced by farmers, graziers and the like for individual profit, and with so little general knowledge of the needs of the world, of national or international relations, of labor conditions, or even of the essential science of the business itself, that the production is by no means at the least cost.

The farmer, so far as he understands it, must consider "the market" in deciding what, when and how much to raise, and that "market" touches the next step—distribution.

We here enter the field of speculation. Food is gathered together in such immense quantities for storage and shipment that it offers a most tempting opportunity for "profiteering." In storage rates, transportation rates and "market prices" the cost of food is manipulated and its nature and quality dictated, so that most serious effects are felt in the last stage, that of preparation.

Here stands the housekeeper. Behind her are the needs and preferences of her family, the limits of her time, her strength, her knowledge and her purse. Before her is the retail market, where prices and qualities go up or down, moved by invisible hands. It seldom occurs to her to question or protest as to these prices or the frequently lamentable quality of what is offered. "The market" is more vague to her than it is to the farmer.

We have begun to reach, in recent years, the producer's end of this chain. Large public assistance has been given and wide research made, by governments and by men of genius like Luther Burbank. Experiment stations have been established, instruction offered and all manner of stimulation to improve and guide production.

Under imminent pressure of war conditions we are now beginning to take hold of the distributing part of this great business of feeding the world. The anti-social crime of injuring the people's food, or of charging extortionate prices for the necessities of life, is just beginning to be recognized and will soon meet punishment.

But quite beyond this comes the third stage, the one nearest home, the final process, in the hands of the housekeeper. This work must now be studied as to its efficiency and economy.

Recent studies in distribution of manufactured articles show that of the consumer's dollar about one-third pays for the goods, say one-sixth goes to the manufacturer, one-sixth to the wholesaler, and the other third to the retailer. In food products the retailer often gets much more than a third, sometimes more than one-half.

No other retail business demands such limitless rehandling. Our drygoods stores are crowded with shoppers, but we do not have to buy clothing every day and sometimes oftener. The retail food dealer must pursue the consumer, who is always limited in time and strength; must place his wares as near as possible to the home, must even overflow into wagons and pushcarts, shouting hoarsely through residence streets.

In the classified directory of New York City there are listed three and a half columns of retail drygoods stores; while of retail food stores there are: butchers, sixteen and a half columns; grocers, twelve and a half; bakers, five; confectioners, five; milk dealers, four and a half; delicatessen, four; fruit and nuts, four; butter, cheese and eggs, three and a half; fish, two and a third; ice, one; in all about fifty-eight columns. Of the small shops without telephones, the booths, wagons and pushcarts—the proportion would probably be still greater. Even without speculation or dishonesty it is easy to see how large a part of the cost of our food supplies is due to this profuse multiplication of retail handling and delivery.

Before this expense the housekeeper stands helpless. She has neither knowledge nor power in these weighty matters of production and distribution. Her part in the food problem is to buy as wisely as she can, as cheaply as she must, and to prepare her purchases so as to meet the tastes and needs of the family. I put tastes first because of the peculiarly helpless position of this functionary in relation to those whom she serves.

In other trades the dealer may tell you that he does not “carry” this, or “they are not wearing that”; you may take it or leave it; he has his chance of other patronage. But in this trade here is Jones, who pays the freight, and Mrs. Jones, whose business it is to cook the steak as he likes it, to make apple pie or angel cake as he prefers; and here also are the little Joneses, conservative of taste as children are, merciless in criticism, and—always there. No other worker has to *live with his market* as must the housekeeper with hers.

In our country it has been estimated that only one woman in sixteen keeps even one servant. In the great majority of cases the wife and mother is also the domestic servant, with a total of activities such as to prevent high efficiency in any. To her of late years has come an unwonted pressure of responsibility as to health, as to dietetics. To the limitations of her knowledge and skill, the limitations of her income (the working housewife always has a limited income) and the demands of the family taste, has been added this burden as to proteids and calories. The importance of scientific cooking to the public health is undeniable, but it is made a jest of by newspaper wits, and is by no means taken seriously by Mr. Jones, who prefers the pie “like mother used to make.”

And now comes the great war. It comes even to us, at last, and with it the splendid burden of feeding the world. In facing this duty the food administration first demands larger and more careful production, then applies pressure to the criminally mis-handled processes of distribution, and then turns to the housekeeper and bids her save!

We are asking economy of the most wasteful of our industrial processes, the inherently and hopelessly wasteful method of preparing food by means of one cook and one kitchen to each family. To get the best results from our effort to improve this primitive industry we must supply to all our millions of housewives, printed in many languages, the plainest and simplest of directions. These should give not only information as to food values and methods of economizing, but model menus, "balanced rations," with a graded scale of cost, showing what is the least amount and variety that will keep us in health and working efficiency, and offering wider choices also.

This being done it remains to see that prices and wages are such as to allow at least this minimum to all our people, else we remain ill-nourished and underfed, as so many are now, in spite of all the proposed instruction. And further it remains, in some as yet undiscussed manner, to induce the family to eat what we have so laboriously urged the housekeeper to prepare.

Among women already intelligent, already competent, already willing, much may be done. People who have purchased too lavishly, who have wasted riotously, may be induced to retrench, and simple restrictions, such as going without wheat bread or meat on certain days, will be widely accepted. But in the face of what may prove the most important phase of this world-changing war, our well-meant campaign of trying to improve conditions in twenty million kitchens, trying to change the habits of twenty million cooks, seems both futile and pathetic.

What should be the attitude of the housekeeper, and of the nation, toward the food problem?

It should be recognized that the preparation of food is no longer a domestic industry. It is no more an integral part of home life than is the making of cloth, once so exclusively feminine and domestic that the unmarried woman is still spoken of as a "spinster." So perhaps might the term "cookster" be applied to women long after they have escaped that universal service.

The scientific knowledge, the trained skill, the wide experience, the discriminatory buying power which should be devoted to the proper feeding of the world can never be developed by the overworked, ignorant, unpaid mother-servant.

In the interests of economy we should clearly see that a system of service which wastes 90 per cent of the "plant," of the running expenses and of the labor involved—which allows maximum prices with all manner of extortion, and inferiority of materials, and which patently fails to maintain the health of the community, ought not to be persisted in merely from inherited sentiment and habit.

The drained and wasted nations are beginning to count their "woman power," to see that where men must die women must take their places as workers. They are doing this the world over with such unexpected ability and success as to give a new status to womanhood. The women of America share with the men of America in the high honor of such a call to world service as never came to any nation before. It is possible that bitter necessity may be added to the call of honor before our work is done.

That this work may be well done, quickly done, done with the least loss of life and treasure, requires the best service of all.

With what conscience then can we persist in a method of industry which, in kitchen service alone, wastes the labor of nine women out of ten? If all house service was professionalized, done by trained specialists with proper organization and mechanical conveniences, we could release the labor power of 80 per cent of our women.

Counting that labor at charwoman's wages, say \$500 a year, allowing fifteen out of our twenty million women as working housewives (this omits those housewives now wage-earners, those too old or sick to labor, and those to whom a year should be given for childbearing and nursing) the released labor of four-fifths of the fifteen, namely twelve million, would be worth \$6,000,000,000 a year.

Their product value would at least equal their wages, another \$6,000,000,000 a year. The saving in cost of food materials, by eliminating both the whole retail expense and the inevitable waste of minute rehandling in small quantities, would be fully 50 per cent. If the average American family now spends \$500 a year on food, and if the saving was but two-fifths, or \$200, there would be another \$4,000,000,000. This gives a pleasing total of \$16,000,000,000 which in an extreme hypothetical case we might save each year.

No such sudden and universal change of system is to be expected. It would not be desirable instantly to eliminate a whole complex business, as the retail food trade. These large estimates are given to show the importance of the food problem, and the enormity of the waste involved in our primitive method of treatment.

The housekeeper herself should realize that her devotion to duty results not in economy, but in waste, not in safeguarding the health of the family, but in maintaining a system of feeding people which keeps our standard of health low, and sees it going lower. The world's gain in health is made in those diseases combated by sanitary legislation; we are losing in what may be called "food diseases." If the housekeeper does recognize her high public duty in regard to the food problem, what can she do to meet it? And what can the food administration do to help her?

As we have experiment stations to establish standards and gather information for our farmers, so we should now establish at least one national food laboratory, an experiment station for the benefit of the housekeeper. Such a laboratory should be in charge of men and women of the highest ability, a staff capable of meeting all demands of this exacting work, for the preparation of food for modern humanity is by no means the simple service we commonly consider it, but is an art, a science, a business and a handicraft. From an authoritative center like this should be distributed accurate information as to food values and prices, with bulletins for special localities and seasons. With an experienced buyer, with the most expert handling of all the valuable by-products of this great industry, now so wastefully mishandled as "garbage," with storage and refrigeration facilities, with such arrangements with dairymen and local market gardeners as would be easy with large and steady orders, with a preserving department to take advantage of surplus materials, and with all accounts carefully kept and freely published, we should at last be in a position to *know* what really is the "cost of living."

Figures could be given on a series of diet lists, all equally wholesome, but varying in materials and in prices. The best and fullest information would thus be available to the housekeeper unable to change her industrial position, as also to all institutions where cooking is done on a larger scale. We should at least have an au-

thoritative standard, a minimum below which no poorhouse or prison would be allowed to fall, and a maximum above which anyone should be ashamed to waste money on eating. From such a center local service kitchens could be established as fast as needed, with intelligent modification as to race or religious customs and personal preferences. On the side of individual initiative the same thing may be done far and wide; but at least in the beginning the sanction of government authority and the reach of government power would be of great advantage.

Now, if anyone asks, "And where is the money to come from to do all this?" the answer is comfortably simple. The money will come from the pockets of those who buy the appetizing products of these food laboratories, and it will cost them less, far less than it does now. That is precisely the feature of the food problem which is here emphasized, that our present method is not economical as popularly supposed, but is madly expensive.

Look at the food budget of one hundred families who keep cooks: \$30 a month for each cook, \$360 a year per family, \$36,000 for the group. The necessary force of one manager, one clerk, six cooks and kitchen men and two delivery men, with salaries averaging two thousand, would be but \$20,000 a year, a saving of \$16,000. The saving in coal bill or gas bill for kitchen use would be in much greater degree, as would the incidental expenses of all kinds. The cost of the food itself, now perhaps \$30 a week for the family of five and the cook, totaling \$156,000 a year for the hundred families, could be cut in half by proper wholesale buying and the economy of scientific handling in quantity. If the saving was but little over a third, say, the \$56,000, that, with the \$16,000 saved on labor and the other incidental savings in fuel, light, utensils, breakage, etc., it would amount to some \$75,000 a year. If the hundred families were content to accept a saving of but \$500 a year each, there would remain \$25,000, quite sufficient to maintain an elaborate kitchen and two delivery motor vehicles.

A hundred families willing to make this change in living could pay for their new outfit, motors, food containers and all in the first year and after that find their labor expense reduced from \$36 to \$20 a month, their food expense reduced from a third to a half, and the quality of that living improved.

Beyond this direct saving in money we have the far larger

items of the released labor, its earnings for the family, its product for the nation. And all this gain would be greater in proportion to the need of it, the relative saving to our poorest more than that of the rich.

Details of food containers, keeping things hot and cold for hours, should present no difficulties to manufacturers of thermos bottles and fireless cookers. Such, and suitable delivery wagons, are already in use in Europe.

The most important thing is the establishment of authoritative food laboratories to save the mistakes and discouragement of scattered efforts, and the next is for our housekeepers to recognize the imperative duty of the change of method in this industry.

Some difficulty will be experienced, no doubt, from the objections of Mr. Jones, but if the food is really good and he sees himself much richer for the change, he will be convinced in time. More immediately, if the husband and father has gone to the war, the mother at home will be both relieved in labor and enriched in cash. And one generation of children, accustomed to such wiser living, will end opposition forever.

THE RELATION OF THE HOUSEWIFE TO THE FOOD PROBLEM

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The consumer has been much in the limelight of publicity within the past few years. The consuming public is represented so far as foods are concerned by the housewife. It is, therefore, upon the latter that the searchlight has been focused. There is no problem in which the public is more interested than that of food and I may add, no problem in which the public is inclined to do less except to give advice. At any rate there has been much talk, reams of writing and millions of words. These have been cast before the housewife in numerous forms, offering her advice, hurling it at her, rather, showering her with remedies, heralding her as the one able to solve the puzzle of how to reduce the cost of living, assailing her as false to her trust, calling her attention to all sorts of panaceas warranted